

1. **Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.**

The Real Women Creative Writing Competition is a districtwide practice established in 1990-91, and conducted annually during Women's History Month in March. This practice is used as a valuable tool in social studies and language arts classrooms in grades 3 - 12 to help students explore, create and demonstrate an understanding of historical events through creative writing. Its primary purpose is to raise the awareness of students about the wealth of women's history in all areas of life by writing about local women they know. The program objectives are:

1. To recognize and celebrate the varied contributions of women throughout history.
2. To create appreciation and respect for the role that "ordinary" women play in the everyday making of history.
3. To provide an opportunity and incentive for students to express ideas and emotions in a variety of ways for a variety of audiences.
4. To provide a positive forum for communication between the schools and the community and enhance socialization between students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community representatives.
5. To practice interview skills and develop creative writing skills while engaging in the writing process.
6. To provide an opportunity for an authentic learning experience with intrinsic value.
7. To promote appreciation for cultural and gender equity - a component of the Multi-Year Equity Plan.

Each school in the district receives a contest packet which includes a suggested three-day integrated social studies/language arts supplemental curriculum plan aligned with appropriate Core Curriculum Content Standards, guidelines and directions, student entry sheets, and a request form for student certificates for each student that participated in the contest. Each school may submit one winning essay per grade level in the elementary schools, and three entries per grade level in the high schools. A Reading Panel, consisting of district supervisors and community representatives, selects three winning essays per grade level using an established criteria and holistic scoring.

What makes this program **innovative** is the (1) unique approach to the Awards Ceremony that has evolved over the period of several years, and (2) its direct connection to the community at several levels. Community people are the subjects of the essays, serve on the reading panel, and make up a large percentage of the audience. Because students write about a real woman, who is still living, these women are available to be invited to the ceremony and honored. Each essay is key punched using a computer and placed in a beautiful oak frame. Two community people are invited to be "readers" at the ceremony, and read highlighted excerpts from each student essay while the student escorts the woman they wrote about to the front where they are presented with a rose by the student, and the framed essay by a district or community representative. Students winners usually "dress up" for the importance of the occasion, and the honored women **wear expressions of pride and humility** while the excerpts are read and the framed essay presented to them. At times the audience cries, or laughs, or generally appear awed by the historical, political, economic, cultural and occasionally human emotional **factors of her-story - told by students in written composition**. The ceremony lasts for approximately 75 minutes and then students, parents, teachers, principals and community members spend time talking, socializing and sharing the experiences of the evening.

This practice promotes high student achievement because it embraces and reinforces the concept that students respond to assignments that have authentic meaning for them. Students are given an opportunity to relate history to their own lives as they learn and write about the experiences of their grandmothers, mothers, sisters, teachers, and other significant women in the community. A grandmother who escaped from the horrors of The Holocaust, or lived in the South during the segregation era, is able to supply a social studies context that provides a value that goes beyond the words in a history textbook. The Awards Ceremony affords students the opportunity to "present" their product to a real audience for authentic assessment - in addition to the traditional grade received by a teacher in the classroom. Winning students also receive trophies and certificates commemorating the event.

This practice can be replicated in any district by selecting a districtwide coordinator to organize and develop the necessary components of the practice. The purchase of school resources, certificates and prizes require some funding but are optional. Established guidelines, criteria and curriculum activities are available upon request - as well as annual essay booklets.

2. **Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s).**

There are many educational needs addressed by The Real Women Creative Writing Practice. First and foremost is the importance of students acquiring historical understanding of societal ideas and forces that contributed to her story not always being recorded or written down. In order to prepare students to live and work in a global society, there is a need for a curriculum supporting a diverse and caring community. This practice addresses that specific curriculum need. It also adopts the constructivist approach to the instruction of social studies - that students learn best when they analyze and interpret the meaning of new information in relation to past experience. This usually results in authentic achievement with value beyond the school - certainly a component of this experience. The language arts/social studies integrated approach means that learning does not occur in isolation - students learn how to use the interview and writing processes to look at women in their community that contribute in some relevant way to the ongoing history of the nation. The need to address the inclusion of women in curriculum content areas has been identified by federal, state and local educational institutions within the United States. This practice is designated as a component of the district's Multi-Year Equity Plan that addresses gender and cultural equity.

The Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by The Real Women Creative Writing Practice are:

Standard #1	All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.
Standard #2	All students will use information, technology, and other tools.
Standard #3	All students will use critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills.
Standard #4	All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

The Core Curriculum Content Standards addressed by The Real Women Creative Writing Practice are:

- 3.1 All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences.
- 3.2 All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.
- 3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 6.2 All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history and philosophy, and related fields.
- 6.3 All students will acquire historical understanding of political and diplomatic ideas, forces, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.
- 6.4 All students will acquire historical understanding of societal ideas and forces throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States and the world.
- 6.5 All students will acquire historical understanding of varying cultures throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.
- 6.6 All students will acquire historical understanding of economic forces, ideas, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.
- 6.7 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying the world in spatial terms.
- 6.8 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying human systems in geography.
- 6.9 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying the environment and society.

As stories unfold, students have a greater understanding of the physical and human characteristics that contribute to migration, patterns of settlement, decision-making, and the application of democratic principles in their local community and throughout the world. They are also introduced to the many careers and skills the honorees possess, and they will need to acquire.

The cumulative progress indicators under the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards and the Core Curriculum Content Standards listed above provide a framework for teachers to use on varied grade levels as they initiate and implement the creative writing practice in their classroom activities.

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

Assessment measures for The Real Women Creative Writing Practice are varied. To evaluate learning in the social studies and language arts, teachers use learning activities themselves as assessment tools. Students develop interview questions and practice analytical and interview skills basic to the gathering of oral history materials. Students practice oral communication and written composition skills while engaging in the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing an essay). Opportunities for peer, self, and teacher assessment are many during shared writing and shared reading of drafts. At the classroom level, the essays are scored holistically by teachers using the standard writing rubric and may be chosen by students for placement in showcase portfolios. At the school level, the principal or designee is responsible for evaluating and selecting one winner per grade level to be submitted to the central office. At the district level a reading panel, using an established criteria, chooses three winning essays per grade level. There is no 1st, 2nd or 3rd winner - all three essays are winners on an equal basis. This strategy reinforces the spirit of the equity component and the intrinsic value of the practice.

Since learning is ongoing and continuous during the entire process, assessment is both informal and formal resulting in the published essay as the authentic performance-based product. Many experts agree that performance assessments are much more effective at capturing students' thinking and interest, and this appears to be true with this contest. Ninety-nine per cent of the student winners attend the ceremony with their families and friends; there has been an increase in the number of male writers and winners over the years; the number of audience attendees has steadily increased over the years, with more than three hundred people attending in March 98, in addition to attendance by the student winners; letters of appreciation from family and community members have been written to the coordinator of the program; and letters to the editor of the local newspaper have become more evident. Most of this assessment has occurred in an informal manner through observation and an increase in the materials needed for the ceremony.

A published booklet of winning student essays is supplied to each family and community member attending the ceremony. The essays are also typed and placed in an oak frame for presentation to the women honored. This practice is well received by students and the women honored. Each participating student, teacher and reading panelist receives a certificate of participation; each student of a winning essay receives a trophy and creative writing pin.

The Real Women Creative Writing Practice is aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Social Studies and Language Arts. A curriculum component is sent to each school and disseminated to each participating teacher. This is used as a framework for activities conducted in the classroom, and provides a means of assessing the effectiveness of the practice objectives. Documentation of the practice is recorded in the teacher's plan book and observed during informal and formal teacher evaluation.